



Australian Bureau of Statistics

1301.6 - Tasmanian Year Book, 1998

ARCHIVED ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 13/09/2002

Feature Article - Census history in Tasmania

1804 to 1841

The earliest statistics of Van Diemen's Land were compiled in response to the immediate domestic concerns of the colony, such as the amount of food and the number of people to be fed. This information had to be kept under careful and continuous review.

In the early days of the colony (1804 until 1841), the information was obtained from musters.

There were two types of musters, both compulsory:

- Convict musters, which were held frequently, usually after Divine Service on Sunday, allowed for checking convicts' names off against a list, issuing provisions and making health checks.
- General musters, which were held less frequently, allowed for counts of the total population (convicts and free settlers), as well as recording information relating to agricultural activities. The musters were the forerunners of the current population census, which collects characteristics of population.

Civil condition (convict or free settler) and sex were generally the only characteristics of population with which the musters were concerned, whereas the census included name, age, sex, occupation, birth place, religion, conjugal condition and level of education. Dwelling information was also collected.

All persons were legally required to attend musters, whereas for population censuses appointed collectors visited each dwelling.

POPULATION OF VAN DIEMEN'S LAND(a)

	1824	1835
Free population	6,029	21,991
Convict population	5,938	16,968
Total	11,967	38,959

(a) There is some doubt about the accuracy of these early statistics, but, nevertheless they are immensely valuable as statistical records of the early days of Van Diemen's Land.

Source: The Development of Official Statistics in Tasmania.

1842 to 1889

The first census of population in Tasmania was taken on 1 January 1842. The results, including a

total population of 57,420, were published in a Hobart Town Gazette issued on 11 April 1843. This census was taken under the provision of an Act, (5 Vict. No. 7), which directed that an account of the population should be taken annually on 1 January.

Further censuses were held on 1 January 1843, 1 January 1848, 1 March 1851 and 31 March 1857. Several problems associated with these censuses were identified, including:

- limitation of information imposed by the design of the census form;
- omission of some households;
- high degree of illiteracy of the population;
- lack of suitable staff to act as collectors; and
- suspect tabulation of results.

By the 1861 census the forms had been redesigned and expanded and householders themselves were required to complete the forms delivered by the census collectors. The census day, 8 April, coincided with the taking of censuses in the United Kingdom and all other Australasian colonies. A census of schools was taken in conjunction with the population census of 1870.

The census of 1881 again coincided with the taking of censuses in the United Kingdom and all other Australasian colonies. This census marked a number of significant advances, such as:

- publication of census notices in newspapers;
- inclusion of details of land occupation;
- provision of maps to collectors; and
- more comprehensive analysis of results.

1890 to 1996

Following a Conference of Statisticians held in Hobart in 1890, the census of 1891 throughout the Australasian colonies used a schedule of core topics and applied a standard method of classification and tabulation of results.

The method of tabulation allowed preliminary results to be published within 3 weeks of census day.

Following another Conference of Australasian Statisticians, held in Sydney in early 1900, uniform principles for the collection and compilation of census data were applied for the 1901 census, which was taken simultaneously with the other Australian colonies.

After Federation, there was now a greater need for statistical uniformity to allow realistic comparisons between States and meaningful aggregates for Australia as a whole.

The Commonwealth Constitution provides for the Commonwealth to make laws with respect to census and statistics; accordingly the new Federal Parliament passed the Census and Statistics Act in 1905.

The first census under this Act was taken in 1911 and was followed by censuses in 1921, 1933, 1947, 1954 and 1961 and at 5-yearly intervals thereafter.

This page last updated 8 December 2006

© Commonwealth of Australia

All data and other material produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) constitutes Commonwealth copyright administered by the ABS. The ABS reserves the right to set out the terms and conditions for the use of such material. Unless otherwise noted, all material on this website – except the ABS logo, the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, and any material protected by a trade mark – is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Australia licence